



ARTICLES

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Report: Sen. Ensign Rewriting Telecommunications Act

According to a published report, U.S. Sen. John Ensign, with the approval of Sen. Ted Stevens, is rewriting the 1996 Telecommunications Act with an eye toward deregulation.

By TED GLANZER, TMCnet Communications and Broadband Columnist

It appears that service providers have a friend in U.S. Sen. John Ensign (R-Nev.), chairman of the Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Technology, Innovation and Competitiveness.

Indeed, according to an article posted on njtelecomupdate.com, Ensign has been charged with rewriting certain sections of the 1996 Telecommunications Act with an eye toward deregulation.

Initial reports (including one appearing here) indicated that Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, would handle tweaking the telecommunications law.

Apparently Stevens – who selected Ensign as chair of the national technology subcommittee – already has his hands full with digital television issues.

Regardless, the article, citing unnamed sources, reported that Ensign's draft would eliminate government intrusion on new technologies, such as subjecting VoIP providers only to federal regulation.

In addition, telecoms seeking to launch IPTV solutions, such as Verizon and SBC, would be able to obtain national franchise agreements rather than having to negotiate licensing agreements at the local or state level.

Telecoms have long viewed having to obtain local licenses as an unfair barrier to launching their IPTV services.

The article noted, however, that no industry would be favored in the bill – so cable companies could also have the ability to obtain national franchise agreements as well.

Such a bill would be consistent with comments Ensign made in February when he was appointed chairman of the technology subcommittee.

“Whenever possible, we need to remove government obstacles and allow innovators to provide the latest and best products to consumers everywhere,” Ensign said in a statement released on Feb. 1. “Our tech industry is greatly responsible for one of the largest economic expansions in American history, and we need to allow that free-market spirit to continue to thrive.”

Additionally, Ensign in the last few months has pushed for a crackdown on spyware technology and has called for a permanent Internet tax ban.

The draft Telecommunications Act rewrite is expected to be introduced by mid-July.

Ted Glanzer is assistant editor for TMCnet. For more articles by Ted Glanzer, please visit:

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